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FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: SALEH REQUESTS DETAINEE RELEASE AND RETURN OF
MOAYED

REF: SANAA 60

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (U) On January 12, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh handed the Ambassador a letter to President Bush praising the current Middle East peace initiative and requesting the release of Yemenis held in Guantanamo. In the meeting, Saleh also requested that jailed Yemeni cleric Sheikh al-Moayed be allowed to finish his prison sentence in a Yemeni jail and pleaded for a reduced USG focus on the case of Jamal al-Badawi. The timing of Saleh's letter probably reflects his concern that he is vulnerable to criticism that he has not done enough to obtain the release of Yemeni detainees. End Summary.

12. (C) On January 12, the Ambassador met briefly with President Saleh at the President's palace in Sana'a. Saleh passed to him a letter for President Bush (ref. A) noting the President's current visit to the region and ongoing efforts toward Middle East peace. The letter also requested that the USG release all Yemeni detainees held at Guantanamo and return Yemenis serving sentences in US jails to their homeland to serve out their terms. The Ambassador agreed to convey the contents of the letter immediately and noted that the two governments were cooperating on preparations for a Yemeni delegation to travel next month to Guantanamo to work toward the possible repatriation of Yemeni detainees.

13. (C) As the Ambassador arrived, President Saleh complained about the USG's continued focus on convicted USS Cole bombing conspirator Jamal al-Badawi. "Don't make him a problem -- he is in jail, you can go see him if you want," Saleh said. "Every delegation that I see brings him up." The Ambassador pointed out again that the USG is seeking custody of Badawi and added that he has been delivering this message since his initial meeting with Saleh on the topic in October, 2007.

14. (C) Saleh also broached the topic of Sheikh al-Moayed, a convicted terrorist financier currently in prison in Colorado. He appealed for the return of Moayed to Yemen to serve out the remainder of his sentence. In spite of the obvious similarity to requests included in the body of the letter, Saleh specified that his comments on Moayed were separate from the message for President Bush.

Comment

15. (C) The timing of Saleh's message seems likely to be a response to a conference on Guantanamo detainees recently held in Sana'a (septel). On this issue, and on the issue of Moayed, Saleh probably feels vulnerable to criticism that he

is getting little in return for his friendship with the United States, and needs to be seen as acting more robustly to protect Yemeni citizens held in what some see as illegal custody. His spontaneous outburst on Badawi as the meeting began likely reveals his frustration that the case almost certainly contributed to the fact that his friend the U.S. President was making a high-profile visit to several neighboring countries without a stop in Sana'a. End Comment.
SECHE